1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5
Ethiopia MP1

A E 563 567

sible in modern times, though the conversion is solemnized shamefacedly by the minor clergy and with very little ado. The racial distinctions between "persons of dishonorable ancestry" are expressed in the following Amharic aphorisms:

> "(One) of unknown father
> (Two) wellaj (i.e. father Amhara, Mother Shanqalla:
> (Three) barya (i.e. full-blooded slave);
> (Four) gabecha (any half-breed, incl. half-Italian)."

In setting them side by side without distinction, the aphorism warns the hearer to look well into the ancestry of a prospective mate, for he or she may be descended from any of these classifications.

A E 609

European foreigners are not included in these classifications, especially if they belong to nationalities of recent contact with Ethiopians. But the Armenians, in contact for many centuries, appear in the upper infidel group (the term "arämani" had the connotation of "idolator, hence Cruel"). Today some of the modern Ethiopian nationalists pretend to despise them as "moneybags", while actually envying their commercial and professional talents. The term "arab" has long meant trader, caravan importer, slave dealer. The term for Protestant, probably of 19th century origin, means "enemy of Mary", because that is what impressed the Coptic Amhara most when the missionaries preached to them at that time. The old term "färänj (Frank), foreigner, is still in use, and in rural spots children will still sometimes run after a foreigner pointing fingers as if he were a strange, hence inferior, animal. But in urban usage, especially in Addis Ababa, the term is now applied officially without any derogatory connotations.

[352] accumulate there when poured over the limp sheets of bread.

251 (7) Food staples must be stored out of reach of domestic animals, on horizontal slats fastened between the horizontal beam and walls. On these slats lie flat cakes of "abshelo" (pre-fermented and baked hops), bunches of sorghum, husks of maize, etc.

352 To provide additional privacy, togas can be hung across. This was done in the past particularly at dinner [754] time, to protect the eaters from the "evil eye" in the [609] presence of non-kinsmen, and is still done in some remote areas, unless the peasant prefers to postpone his meal until the stranger has gone away, so as not to offend him.

342 The tuqul is regarded as a good, sound habitation by the Amhara. It is compared to the round tent of the king and duke ("ras") which not so long ago was the center of activities (if not the actual capital) of the province and [554] country. On the other hand, reactangular or square huts, "säqäla", are regarded as carrying low prestige, little more than temporary lean-to's of hunters. The proverb indicates [539] this low regard of a säqäla:

"Of children, the worst is the bastard;
of foods, the hardest is beans;
of clothing, the poorest is nṭäla (half-toga);
of housing, the poorest is säqäla."

Response: "(but) from enemy, the bastard son will defend you;
toward better days the bean will let you survive;
in (warm) daytime, the nṭäla will clothe you;
till a better is built, the säqäla will shelter you".

There are special tuquls of varying degrees of sturdiness:

243
[251] expose a full granary to the mercy of the feudal lord and passing soldiers.

Before threshing can begin, about a month after the end of the rainy season, a flat, circular area is marked out with rocks. Cowdung is stamped into the wetted floor, and the sun hardens the ground into cement-like consistency in one day. This threshing floor, called "awdema", is usually big enough to accommodate at least 4 oxen that are now driven over the grain, abreast but not tied, walking in a steady circle all day long, a procedure called "mabārayāt". On the third day, winnowing (called "māshin") takes place, by means of wooden pitchforks cut from a hardwood bush without carpentry (thus usually two-pronged), and a semi-circular winnowing fan about 2 feet long and not quite as wide, made of oxhide that has been stretched on a wooden, semi-circular frame. The threshed grain is covered overnight with branches, to protect it from wind.

On the fourth day, the grain is swept up with simple whiskbrooms made of stalks (e.g. those of wild oats). All these procedures are done as quickly as possible, partly to protect the crop during this stage of maximum vulnerability from birds and baboons, partly because of fear
[754 609] of the evil eye. If an unrelated stranger passes at this time, the farmer sprinkles him with water to avert the possible evil eye. Formerly spitting was the procedure.

In that season many small threshing grounds dot the landscape, especially on river flood plains. Here the plots are usually not more than 100-200 yards long. A minimum team of three men can usually do the job described in four days. Only one person is needed to drive the

754 776 [784] The actual name, "buda", is considered taboo, for it is dangerous and might attract him, when uttered aloud. Since this spirit is always male, his name is paraphrased as "the man's eye" ("yäsäw ayn"), "shadow eye" (ayna tela); and a victim is paraphrased "the man's victim" ("yäsäw gällabi"). Even the term "smith" is used, sometimes indirectly, for further security. Thus, to accuse someone of sorcery, a security-minded Amhara says pointedly, in his presence: "As for me, I am not the son of a smith".

754 609 The first attitude toward strangers is therefore one of caution, lest he be a carrier of "buda". The suspicion is confirmed if the stranger has intelligent eyes, darting eyes, shining eyes, or if he stares curiously without saying much. It is confirmed if he seems skilled manually, for then he may be a "tabib" (lit. trained person, technologically wise), hiding the fact that he was born into the ironsmith caste. It is less disturbing if he openly reveals himself as an ironsmith, for then he lives segregated in a hamlet of his own ethnic group, and when contact must be established for trade (purchase of iron tools and pottery), certain "precautions" against being struck by the evil eye can be taken; extra-vulnerable persons such as pregnant women can be kept from contact; and all transactions will be carried on in full daylight.

754 776 [609] The "buda" is regarded as preferring to strike and feast on women, especially beautiful ones, and to feed, cannibal-style, on fat, beautiful children. The stranger therefore should never praise the health or beauty of children, or of women, out loud. Mothers hide their children at the approach of a stranger. Nice new garments on a child also attract the buda, and this is one reason why children under 5, when infant mortality is highest, are given only rags to wear, and are permitted to be dirty most of the time.

[89] [104]

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

361 I have tried to describe a small section of the old Shoan people in their geographical and historic setting. But this small community, living along the broken edges of the Shoan plateau, typifies the much larger unity of the Amhara nation. Mostly they live in country which resembles either the plateau or the gorges, for they are a mountain people and will not live in the low country; and over most of the Ethiopian highlands their way of life, while varying in detail, is fundamentally the same. Everywhere outside the 181 towns the force of tradition is incomparably stronger than any modern influence, so that life remains, in essentials, what it has been for centuries. I have never come across such a staunch (not to say arrogant) conservatism—a conservatism centred mostly round the old Church which, now as ever, organizes the life of the community. The manifestations of modernity and progress, which now attract some attention in the larger towns, hardly affect the rural picture, and the rural population is content without them. I myself was content without them too, for I valued very highly the experience of sharing the life of a community whose customs, founded on the most ancient traditions, belong essentially to an earlier and to me a congenial age. This [609] was one of the compensations for living in a country where life is necessarily a strain, since the inquisitive foreigner is not really welcome.

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

rusalem. The Falasha again declare, that their circumcision was that commonly practised at Jerusalem in the time of Solomon, and in use among them when they left Palestine, and came into Abyssinia. 304 171

The circumcision of the Abyssinians is performed with a sharp knife, or razor. There is no laceration with the nails, no formula or repetition of words, nor any religious ceremony at the time of the operation, nor is it done at any particular age, and generally it is a woman that is the surgeon. The Falasha say, they perform it sometimes with the edge of a sharp stone; sometimes with a knife or razor, and at other times with the nails of their fingers; and for this purpose they have the nails of their little fingers of an immoderate length. At the time of the operation, the priest chants a hymn, or verse, importing, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hast ordained circumcision!" This is performed on the eighth day, and is a religious rite, according to the first institution by God to Abraham.

The Abyssinians pretend theirs is not so; and, being pressed for the reason, they tell you it is because Christ and the apostles were circumcised, though they do not hold it necessary to salvation. But it is the objection they constantly make against eating out of the same plate, or drinking out of the same cup, with strangers, that they are uncircumcised; while, with the Egyptians or the Cophts, though equally strangers, they make no such difficulty. In the time of the Jesuits, when the Roman Catholic religion was abolished, and liberty given them to return to their old worship, their priests proclaimed a general circumcision; and the populace, in the first days of their fury, or triumph, murdered many Catholics, by stabbing them with a lance in that part, as they met them, repeating, in derision, the Jewish hymn, or ejacula- 304 609

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5

304 tion, "Blessed is the Lord that hath ordained circum-
609 cision!" so that, I believe, their indifference in this article is rather owing to not being contradicted; just as they are careless about every other part of religion, unless such as have been revived in their minds by disputes with the Jesuits, and kept up since, in part, among their clergy. But none of them pretend that circumcision arises from necessity of any kind, or from any obstruction or impediment to procreation, or that it becomes necessary for cleanliness, or from the heat of climate.

304 None of these reasons, constantly alleged in Europe, are ever to be heard of here; nor do I believe they have the smallest foundation any where: and this, I think, should weigh strongly in favour of the account Scripture gives of it. Examining the origin of this ceremony, independent of this revelation, I will never believe that man, or nations of men, rashly submitted to a disgraceful, sometimes dangerous, and always painful operation, unless there had been proposed, as a consequence, some reward for submitting to, or some punishment for refusing it, which balanced in their minds the pain and danger, as well as disgrace, of that operation.

All the inhabitants of the globe agree in considering it shameful to expose that part of their body, even to men; and in the East, where, from climate, you are allowed, and, from respect to your superiors, the generality of men are forced to go naked, all agree in covering their waist, which is called their *nakedness*, though it is really the only part of their body that is covered. We see even that there a curse * at-

* Gen. chap. ix. ver. 22.

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920) 1935
MP5 Amhara MP5

The Abyssinian calendar for *their* current year (leap year for them) accordingly compares with ours as shewn on the previous page; and in the last month given, the calendar resumes its normal correspondence with ours as, owing to the occurrence of our leap year, February has an extra day in 1936.

Apart from their language, there are many customs and practices amongst the Abyssinians which differentiate them sharply from most of the other peoples of Africa, and not the least interesting of these are clearly traceable to their ancient connection with Israel, of which they speak with pride in their old records.

For example, much of their religious pageantry, which is described in detail elsewhere, is undoubtedly a remarkable survival of rites which must have been introduced by the earliest Jewish arrivals, such as the Dance of the Priests, their ceremonies connected with the Tabot, and many others. Similarly, their method of slaughtering cattle for food, the division of animals into clean and unclean, etc., are all indications pointing in the same direction.

Their dislike of Jews to-day is accordingly the more remarkable, and must be due to the sanguinary wars which took place from the fourth to the tenth centuries between the newly-converted Christians and those who remained Jews.

Among other customs which are peculiar and interesting, pride of place must surely be given to their fondness for raw meat or *broundo*. This form of diet is preferred to any other by the mass of the population, and indeed by practically all sections thereof, beef being liked better than mutton.

When we were on trek our men could be given no

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935.
MP5 Amhara MP5

793 They have always been bitterly opposed to pro-
176 gress and to innovations, more so as regards changes in their own Church than as regards the introduction into the land of alien religions, strange to say. Thus for example a learned individual, a very religious layman whom I knew, had been accused by the priests of expounding the Gospels in a manner somewhat different to that generally accepted, and as a result he was imprisoned for three years. His views on the subject of his own Church were instructive!

On the other hand they are by no means so in-
793 tolerant to other religious beliefs and efforts in the
●609 country; they are not fanatical, and if left alone and not interfered with are not markedly anti-foreign. Individually I have always found them quite pleasant and friendly, and I am bound to say that Mr Wylde, who met a great many of them in various parts of the country, seemed vastly to prefer them to European missionaries. But as a body I think they are—to put it mildly—an unfortunate institution, and so far as their possessions are concerned, treatment on the lines adopted by our Henry VIII would seem to be overdue.

609 Moslems, Jews, and others practise their religion
795 in peace. I have seen religious processions of the followers of Islam on their feast days pass through the streets shouting and singing completely free from molestation, and on the occasion of my last visit I saw a mosque which was on the verge of completion being constructed in one of the principal streets of Addis Ababa.

It is rather remarkable that in spite of the bitter religious warfare in which they have been engaged for centuries Abyssinians should be so tolerant of their

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5

age-long enemies and should allow them to profess their faith openly as they do, when one considers the havoc wrought by Moslem invasions and Galla inroads.

Even the Falasha Jewish ironworkers in the north, who are doubly regarded with dislike and suspicion as being Jews and as being possessed of supernatural powers, are treated with tolerance, though avoided.

No doubt this happy result is contributed to so far as Moslems are concerned by the fact that in Abyssinia they do not appear to be strict or fanatical—in pleasing contrast to their behaviour elsewhere. Mr Wyman Bury tells a delightful story in exemplification of this latter frame of mind. A pilgrim to Mecca, a plump and prosperous Moslem merchant at Aden in ordinary life, was gazing from the deck of the ship in rapt enthusiasm at Jeddah, which against the sun-scorched country beyond looked like a stale bridecake on a dust-heap. "Oh, the sacred land," he crooned "the blessed land, where pigs and Christians cannot live."

The Abyssinians still have a church in Rome, a monastery in Jerusalem, and monasteries and Ethiopic texts were discovered in the Libyan desert by the German explorer Falls.

The Abyssinian Church endeavours to maintain friendly relations with the other Christian communities: interesting examples of this are the missions sent to the Pope by the Emperor Menelik in 1906 and by the late Empress in 1921. A mission was also in Jerusalem at the close of 1922 in connection with some ancient rights of the Abyssinian Church regarding the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other holy places; under the Turkish régime these rights had been transferred to the

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*565 156 159 man, as we shall see in more detail below, includes the quality of leaving others alone.

[597] This strong sense of self is confirmed and symbolized by two conspicuous *565 156 411 Amhara customs: carrying staves and going on trips. A staff, like a pipe, affirms the ego in two ways. As a piece of personal property right at hand, it stimulates a sense of pride of ownership; as something external yet confronting the person, it makes the ego more conscious of its bounded reality. Such sensations are daily experiences for the Amhara peasant, who is rarely separated from the staff in one form or other. When he leaves his homestead he normally carries the hard *dulā*, a potential weapon of defense that likewise affirms his ego by bolstering self-confidence in a dangerous world. He braces the *dulā* against his back as he treks along, or holds it against the [481] front of his shoulder like a rifle. Older men walk using it as a cane. A special kind of staff made of softer wood (*zang*) is carried by pious and elderly [481] men. Participants in devotional services lean on still another type of staff (*maquāmiyā*) which is distributed in the church for that purpose.

*565 156 484 Traveling is another custom which affirms the ego, at least when one travels spontaneously and not in organized company. As the individual moves past various stimuli, his self-consciousness is heightened by the contrast between a persisting ego and a constantly changing environment. As a traveler par excellence—and a lone traveler, unless social rank requires the presence of retainers—the Amhara peasant frequently removes himself from familiar home settings and confronts an outside world. He loves to go on the road and will travel at the slightest provocation. For him a distance of two or three hours by foot is like the American's trip to the corner drugstore. Whether to visit relatives or pay respects after death, to go to market or to court, to get holy water at a distant church, or to look after land in a far away district, the Amhara peasant is on the move dozens of times each year, often for trips involving two or three days of travel.

*565 156 829 602 609 Because of the great emphasis on the self in Amhara experience and culture, one may for the moment say that the personal ego is the central object in the Amhara peasant's view of society. Exactly what might be meant by this statement and in what respects it needs qualification are questions that will be taken up in the concluding chapter. If it is so, certainly the next most prominent social object in his world is the circle of close ones, or *zamad*. *Zamad* refers in the first instance to consanguineal kin, and is distinguished from the category of those who are strangers, or *bā'ed*. This is perhaps the most important of all the sociological distinctions made by the Amhara: the former, *zamad*, are seen as entitled to the warmest hospitality, while toward *bā'ed* indifference and suspicion are appropriate responses.

*565 156 602 This does not mean that the kin group is a corporate entity whose interests and identity transcend that of the individual. On the contrary, the notion of

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

in time of crisis, but otherwise occupy an inconspicuous place in the Amhara's world. His prayers and oaths, his calendar, and his simple precautions against evil spirits are matters of habit. He has no driving concern with the supernatural in his daily life.

In the human realm, collective symbols and endeavors are not a major focus of attention. The demands of family, church, and state are, like the seasons, familiar and unproblematic; like nature, these institutions call for simple adjustment. On the personal side, sexuality plays a modest part in the Amhara's outlook. Sex as such is not talked about much. It is enjoyed, beneath the surface of social life, with little fuss or problems other than the usual practical ones.

By contrast, the phenomenon of man's aggression is seen, discussed, pondered, and worried about to a considerable extent. The Amhara sees himself and his fellows as prone to aggression as soon as hunger no longer checks them or festivity has raised their spirits. He is wary of the stranger, forever fearful that the unfamiliar *saw* may attack with the evil eye. He sees the outsider as bent on aggrandizement, constantly plotting to seize his patch of earth. How to keep man's potential for aggression under control is a recurrent question in Amhara experience. The Amhara considers a pitiless regime of fasting to be the only way he can keep his hostile impulses subdued, and believes that children must not be spared the rod lest they be rude and aggressive. He withholds esteem from young men on the grounds that they are prone to throw insults and pick fights. On the other hand, he sets up occasions, like the whipping battles on Buhē and the rough play and insulting at Christmas, when the acting out of aggressive impulses is controlled through being carried on in a legitimate context. He idealizes the men of peace, the priest and the elder, for their work in putting moral pressure on people to observe the fasts and to reconcile quarrels.

At the same time, the Amhara peasant is greatly concerned about ways and means of improving his capacity for aggression, both through the technique of litigation and through violent means. He trains his sons to be brave and to fight well, and chants with enthusiasm the inflaming martial verses of *shĭllalā*. He idealizes the fighter as much if not more than the man of peace. Litigants, hunters, and warriors keep vital the Amhara ideal of masculinity, which every peasant must cultivate in order to protect his land and his honor.

The Amhara peasant is simultaneously preoccupied with the stimulation and the control of aggressive behavior. The previously mentioned conflict of norms regarding violence is perhaps the chief area of moral conflict in his thinking about the good life. Though nature, God, and other aspects of man's life occupy much of his attention from time to time, it appears that the phenomenon of human aggression dominates the confrontation between the Amhara peasant and the objects of his experience.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

phenomena, traits inherited from earlier traditions and retained through inertia, and that no psychological processes need be invoked in describing them. But this argument fails to explain why, in view of the harmful physical and political consequences of their excessive fasting, the Amhara should have developed in the direction of increasing rather than alleviating their fasting burden. For Abyssinia's commitment to fasting was well known by her enemies, and used to her disadvantage: Ahmad Grāñ took advantage of the country's weakness during Lent to launch his attacks at that time year after year, and the Galla hordes who succeeded him did likewise. The argument also fails to explain why the taboos on pork and tobacco, and the fasting prescriptions, should have been pushed to the forefront of Amhara Christian consciousness. For observance of these mores is considered the very crux of Christianity by traditional Amhara. Amhara often refer to fasting as the most important part of their religion. If a person fails to fast, his relatives are technically absolved from the duty of providing memorial feasts for him when he dies; let his soul wander in darkness! Fasting more than anything else protects them from the devil and enhances the likelihood of their entering paradise.

Apart from their adherence to these cultural norms, moreover, the Amhara also manifest anxiety regarding oral gratification at the purely psychological level. There is, on the one hand, a constant undertone of concern among Amhara about getting enough to eat, even under favorable agricultural conditions. On the other hand, there is a good deal of concern about the consequences of eating too much. There is much worry among the Amhara about the dangers of excessive eating at the conclusion of periods of fasting. There is also the fear that if one indulges in eating and drinking he may become uncontrollably hostile, a fear expressed in the previously mentioned notion of *ţegābaññā*. These and other forms of anxiety about oral gratification are expressed in a number of folk tales, in which eating, drinking, singing, talking, or simply opening one's mouth result in such misfortunes as sickness, loss of property, and death.[20] A similar theme appears in the epic *Glory of Kings:* the Queen of Sheba, in satisfying her thirst by drinking from a goblet which King Solomon had placed in her bedroom, thereby forfeited her right to immunity from his amorous desires and was obliged to yield to his embrace.

Ambivalence regarding oral aggressiveness, finally, may be discerned in the Amhara's anxiety about being eaten, an anxiety which should probably be interpreted as an externalization of unacceptable oral-sadistic impulses. Traditional Amhara have a morbid fear of being "eaten" by those with the evil eye, *budā* and *ţayb*, men who are believed to destroy their victim by invisibly sucking his blood. It is largely because of this fear that children are kept away from strangers. Similar projections appear in connection with other well-known figures in Amhara culture. Another fearful object is the *çhirāq*, a giant

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*121 571 264 181 [829] A similar spirit is observed in Amhara commensality. Meals are customarily eaten from a common *ĭnjarā* basket. The sauce is ladled onto the center of the *ĭnjarā*, and is consumed ensemble by those sitting around the basket as they dip into it with pieces of *ĭnjarā* broken off from the edges. Traditional Amhara scoff at what they regard as the excessively individualistic Western custom of sitting each person down to a separate place at the table and thus depriving the meal hour of what they feel should be its basically communal tone.

*121 574 571 181 At a more formal level of interaction this disposition is expressed in the form of *hospitality*. Amhara hospitality is luxuriously attentive and thoughtful. For example, if there is foreknowledge of a guest's arrival, he is awaited at some distance from his destination and escorted with much to-do into the home. His mule is at once unsaddled and given to feed. The guest is given a place of honor in the home, and a glass of *tallā* is immediately brought for him. Amhara etiquette prescribes, moreover, that a glass is not properly filled unless it overflows; and it is repeatedly filled to overflowing whenever the guest has drunk some portion of the beverage. As a gratuitous gesture of good faith, the host—or his wife, or servant—tastes some of the beverage first, a sign that no "medicine" has been added. Before long the wicker table is produced, and the guest and his party are served copiously—no matter what time of day they arrive (unless, of course, it is a fasting day). When the guest has eaten to satisfaction, the host will insist that he eat some more, by repeatedly issuing injunctions like *tegābazu* ("Help yourselves!"), *mokar* ("Try!"), or *āfar sehon* ("If I become dust!"—i.e., "If you do not eat you will be condemning me to death"). The Amhara host is also likely to insist that his guest spend the night. The guest's feet will be washed, and the host's bed will be given to him, or long grass will be cut for bedding on the floor. At the time of farewell, the host and his attendants follow the guest and his party a good distance along the road. The guest continually cries, "Return! Return!" and the host agrees but continues to serve as escort.

Such hospitality is not wantonly bestowed upon the casual wayfarer. Normally it is reserved for those who qualify as worthy guests: relatives, friends, [609] or persons of high rank. Nonetheless, there does exist among the Amhara some feeling that even the unknown stranger should be shown hospitality, for he is *ya-egziābhēr engedā* ("a guest of God"). Travelers are generally assured [485] that somebody somewhere will show them hospitality; there are no inns in traditional Ethiopia, for it is considered wrong to exchange food and lodging for money.

*121 576 571 181 Related to this pattern of hospitality is a delicate sense of *respect* that the Amhara displays toward all comers; often, even toward his enemies. When two Amhara pass each other anywhere, they are expected to bow slightly and say: "How did you pass the night?" or "How did you spend the day?" If they